DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 246 PS 014 801

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TITLE Early Signs of Sex Role Stereotyping among Day Care Toddlers.
PUB DATE Apr 82
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Southeastern Conference on Human Development (7th, Baltimore, MD, April, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Affective Behavior; Child Caregivers; *Day Care; Early Childhood Education; Sex Bias; Sex Differences; *Sex Role; *Sex Stereotypes; *Social Behavior; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Toddlers
IDENTIFIERS Dependency (Personality); Help Seeking; *Social Interaction

ABSTRACT

The emergence of sex-role stereotypes in dependency behaviors exhibited toward day care teachers by male and female toddlers was explored. Communication and interaction attempts, or bids, that 25 male and 25 female toddlers from low income families in day care made toward their teachers were analyzed. Instrumental bids requesting help were significantly more frequent for males. Expressive bids were equally present for boys and girls, but these bids were found to differ in type. Specifically, girls made more positive affectional approaches, while boys made significantly more distress/negative bids. Females were ignored by caregivers more often than males. It was suggested that caregivers may need to help male toddlers find more appropriate ways to meet their needs for nurturance from adults. (Author/RH)

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ED251246

EARLY SIGNS OF SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING AMONG DAY CARE TODDLERS[1]

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The emergence of sex role stereotypes in dependency behaviors exhibited toward day care teachers by male and female toddlers was explored. The bids of twenty-five male and twenty-five female low-income toddlers to their teachers in day care were analyzed. Instrumental bids requesting help were significantly more frequent for males. Expressive bids were equally present for boys and girls but the types of bids differed. Girls made more positive affectional approaches; boys made significantly more distress/negative bids. Caregivers may need to help male toddlers find more appropriate ways to meet needs for adult nurturance.

PS 014801

[1]Paper presented at the Seventh Biennial Southeastern Conference on Human Development, Baltimore, Maryland, April, 1982.

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Problem

Despite the admirable work done by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) which has led to increased sex-role socialization research, we still have few data on activity preferences or bids to day care teachers that differentiate between male and female toddlers. There are also few data on techniques that caregivers in group care settings may use differentially in interacting with boys and girls. Some sex-role socialization research has been carried out in the home. For example, Moss (1974) found that mothers of infants stimulated and attended to boy infants more, but imitated the vocalizations of females more frequently. In general, the results of home studies show that when a baby is male, then parents "foster early socialization in the direction of a masculine stereotype of greater activity and physical prowess" (Honig, 1983, p. 61).

There has been a growing interest in the topic of sex-role socialization of young children in group care settings. Etaugh, Collings & Gerson (1975) found that nursery teachers reinforced male and female two-year olds equally often. And for both male and female toddlers they reinforced a greater proportion of "feminine" behaviors than "masculine" behaviors. Parsons & Bales (1955) theory of sex-role socialization differences posits that males are socialized for instrumental dependence on adults and females for expressive dependence. Bardwick (1971) has defined three types of dependency. In instrumental dependence, objective help is sought. In emotional dependence, affection, support, and comfort are the goals. In aggressive dependence,

the objectives are negative and manipulative. Bardwick states that since the stereotype of the male is to be strong and independent, then instrumental dependency is more acceptable for boys than emotional dependency.

Hypotheses

The present study hypothesized that sex-role differences in dependency behaviors might begin in the toddler years, when many children enter out-of-home care. Toddler bids to teachers in day care were predicted to show the beginnings of sex-role stereotyping of instrumental and expressive dependency. Caregivers encouraging of early sex-role stereotyping would be expected to ignore boys' bids more than girls' bids in order to encourage independence in two-year old males.

Method

Subjects. Toddlers 24 to 30 months old were observed in seven urban day care centers serving low-income families. The subjects were 25 boys and 25 girls. Mean age was 27 months for both boys and girls.

Procedure. APPROACH (Caldwell & Honig, 1971), a fine grained ecological technique for observing and coding child interactions with peers, objects, and caregivers was used to record 80 minutes of toddler behavior across five typical settings (creative, story/song, gross motor, fine motor, and eating) over a mean of nine days per child. Of the 80 minutes of morning day care observations carried out for each child, no more than eight minutes were recorded in any of the five given activity settings per day and no more than 20 minutes total per child per day in order to increase the validity of the "typicalness" of settings sampled and behaviors recorded.

Coding of Toddlers' Bids

From the APPROACH record, children's communication and interaction attempts with teachers were coded into the following five categories by two independent coders, who had no knowledge of any hypotheses to be tested. Intercoder reliability was 95.5%.

1. Seeking help (includes seeking bodily help, help using objects, help with food, interpersonal assistance, and requests for food or an object or toy and asking for permission).

2. Requesting attention (includes seeking teacher's attention for activity involving child's body or an object other than a circumstance of seeking help or expressing need/distress or giving information).

3. Distressed or negative approach to teacher (includes distress when it is a clear bid to the teacher, and also includes angry or aggressive physical contacts directed toward the teacher and includes expressing needs to teacher).

4. Positive approach (includes a child smiling at, hugging, patting, giving or offering something to teacher, or requesting positive physical contact from teacher).

5. Attempt to seek information (includes requests for clarification or explanation).

The teachers' responses to toddler communication attempts were coded into nine mutually exclusive categories. Intercoder reliability was 88.9%.

1. Teaching (informing, facilitating, demonstrating, and directing or refocusing the child roward an activity).

2. Ego boosts (positive reinforcement alone or in conjunction with a teaching technique).

3. Questions

4. Commands

5. Negative responses (such as restricting, negative reinforcement, inhibiting or forbidding).

6. Combinations of positive (1, 2, or 3) with control/negative (4 or 5) responses.

7. Attends

8. Ignores

9. Unknown (as when no teacher response was recorded during observation interval).

Results

Sex Differences and Toddler Bids

Girls made 341 bids to the teachers ($\bar{x}$ = 13/6) and boys made 437 bids ($\bar{x}$ = 17.5) in 66 2/3 hours of observations in Title XX day care centers. This difference was not significant ($p < .12$).

Instrumental versus expressive bids.

The hypothesis that boys would make more "instrumental" bids was supported. When "seeking help" and "seeking information" bids were combined, then boys (211 bids) made more ($p < .05$) of this group of instrumental bids than did girls (139 bids). Boys did seek help significantly more than girls ($p < .05$). They did not, however seek information more than girls.

Expressive bids were equally likely from females and males. When the expressive bids of "positive approach, distress/negative" and "request attention" were combined, boys (226 bids) were equally as expressive as girls (202 bids).

Boys and girls were "expressive" in different ways, however. A closer

look at the different types of expressive bods reveals clear sex differences in the mode of expression. Girls approached the teacher in a positive manner more ($p < .05$) than boys. Girls were more likely than boys to hug and kiss the teacher, say, "I like you", crawl in the teacher's lap, and laugh and greet the teacher. One-fourth of girls' bids, but only 1/10 of boys' communications with teachers were positive bids of this nature. Caregivers may need to signal to toddler males that needs for physical affection are legitimate.

Distress/negative bids were made significantly more ($p < .025$) by boys (23 bids) than girls (7 bids). The seven negative bids boys made included kicking and hitting the teacher, yelling protests, and directing darting tongues and angry looks at the teacher. Caregivers need to be alerted to the fact that male toddlers may have unmet needs for nurturance and may need encouragement to express their needs in more acceptable approaches. The girls' two negative bids to caregivers consisted of an angry look and an angry "Stop". This small sample thus shows boys to be more physical in their negative approach.

Sex Differences in Teacher Responses.

The hypothesis that caregivers would respond to a greater number of female bids than male bids was not supported. The rates were 73.1% and 82.8% respectively. Girls and boys received equal rates of teaching, commands, negative behaviors, questions, ego boosts and combinations of positive and negative responses.

Girls were ignored (26.9%) at a significantly higher ($p < .005$) rate than boys (17.2%). It had been hypothesized that caregivers would ignore males more in an attempt to encourage independence and

discourage male toddlers' needs to control their caregivers (Martin, 1981). Boys used more negative means to elicit responses from adults. They were successful in eliciting fewer ignoring responses to their behaviors. Caregivers may need to learn to channel toddler males' needs for control and attention into more appropriate attention-seeking and expressive bids than the distress/negative behaviors emitted significantly more often by boys compared to girls.

Conclusion

This study found that some of the stereotypic sex differences in dependency behaviors are beginning to appear in toddler encounters with their teachers in day care. For males, there were decreased positive affectional bids and increased numbers of instrumental bids in comparison to females. However, the equal numbers of expressive bids of males and females suggested that needs for nurturance and adult attention are equally strong for both sexes. Females were ignored by care-givers more than males. Caregivers may need to encourage selectively those bids that will enhance chances of male toddlers for acceptance and for successful social encounters.

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